DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 233 130 CE 035 778

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TITLE Stress Management: A Challenge for Adult Education.
PUB DATE [82]
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; Adult Programs; *Change; *Coping; *Educational Responsibility; Individual Needs; Lifelong Learning; Program Development; Stress Variables; *Well Being
IDENTIFIERS *Stress (Biological); *Stress Management

ABSTRACT

The goal for the adult educator in modern society is to help individuals gain the competencies to function adequately with perpetual change. Adult education should plan and implement stress management programs as an educational activity that is a basis upon which people can learn to adapt to societal stress and rapid social evolution. The health care system has focused on pathology with individuals considered as passive patients. An emerging paradigm of health parallels the andragogical principles of adult education developed by Knowles. This approach, which emphasizes self-directed learning, should be adopted by adult educators planning and implementing stress management classes in order to facilitate optimum learning opportunities. Stresses of daily life can have deleterious effects upon one's health. Stress management programs offered by adult educators can teach coping strategies and/or exercises. The andragogical health educator can increase the effectiveness of health teachings by encouraging self-care, balance, and harmony. (YLB)

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ABSTRACT

STRESS MANAGEMENT

A CHALLENGE FOR ADULT EDUCATION

An awesome goal for the adult educator in modern society is to help humankind gain the necessary competencies to function adequately with perpetual change. Stress Management programs which prepare individuals to cope with accelerating change and stress is today's adult education challenge.

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STRESS MANAGEMENT

A CHALLENGE FOR ADULT EDUCATION

Stress Management programs which prepare individuals to cope with accelerating change and stress is today's adult education challenge. Perhaps the greatest danger to the survival of civilization is not environmental pollution, nuclear warfare, population explosion or natural resources depletion, but the inability of man to cope with the changing world. The awesome goal for the adult educator in modern society is to help humankind to gain the necessary competencies to function adequately with perpetual change.

Lifelong learning can be an organizing principle for all education in this world of constant change. Using this guiding principle, the purpose of education is to develop an educative society conducive to growth, with individuals able to engage in lifelong learning and competency to apply knowledge under everchanging conditions. "To adults, education is a process of improving their ability to cope with life problems they face now." (Knowles, 1980, p. 53) The adult educator can help individuals acquire both coping skills and the attitude that learning is a lifelong pursuit.

Community educators from such professions as education, nursing, psychology, medicine, ministry, and social work can assist individuals to develop and to achieve their full potentials by helping people grow in the ability to cope with perpetual change. Qualified instructors should be encouraged to plan and implement Stress Management programs, as this educational activity is a foundation block upon which people can learn to adapt to societal stress and rapid social evolution. Since institutionally sponsored adult education is recently the fastest growing aspect of the U.S. educational system, this is an appropriate institution to be at the forefront of facilitating widespread Stress Management adult education programs.

The Old and New Paradigms

Learning to cope with individual life changes including physical, psychological, interpersonal, and environmental changes and stresses is paramount to the future health of our nation. There are increasing numbers of people who are seeking ways to promote and maintain their health, despite the fact that in the U.S. there are few educators or practitioners focused on selfcare and the health/wellness model of care. Most medical practitioners are focused on pathology: the diagnosis, treatment and/or rehabilitation of pathology resulting from disease, illness, injury or infirmity. Modern American medicine commonly defines health as the absence of pathology, as preventive medicine, preventive ill-health, or worse, as preventive health. Defining a positive in terms of a negative is not positive!

Another negative aspect of our health care system is that individuals are considered passive patients, or worse, consumers dependent on fee-for-service care. The bottom line appears to be profit, the word consumer continues the scenario. As a cornerstone of the U.S economy, the medical-health care industry is the nation's third largest industry after civil service and retailing. Profits of $247 billion or 9.4% ("RX: Competition, 1982") of the Gross National Product in 1980, or better, the Gross National Pathology, were generated within this medical-industrial complex. Of these expenditures, only approximately .4% was spent on health promotion, pathology prevention and health education. Approximately 99.6% was allocated to the pathology/medical model. (Annerude, Note 1) Grim data when one realizes that 50% to 80% of pathology is stress-related and preventable.(Pelletier, 1977). If more funds were spent for health promotion and stress management education, we would have a marked decrease in morbidity and mortality in this country and a healthier populace and environment.

It is now time for the wide acceptance of a wellness ethic, one which emphasizes well-health care. Thankfully, there is an emerging paradigm in

this country towards the recognition that individuals are the unity of their intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional dimensions, not merely physical abnormalities. (IPSE means SELF in Latin) (Kinlein, Note 2) This paradigm is holistic, humanistic and person-oriented; not fragmented and pathology-oriented. The following ideas are also helpful in understanding this health paradigm.

1. Health/wellness can be defined as the integration and balance of an individual with self, others and the environment which enhance one's potential for wellbeing.

2. All phenomenon are fundamentally interrelated and interdependent. Health/wellness practices are synergistic, a blending of parts to create a balanced whole.

3. Individuals are capable of selfcare and harmonizing and vitalizing themselves with others and with their communities.

4. Self-responsibility is encouraged and individuals pursue their own self-determined lifelong goals.

This emerging paradigm of health/wellness care parallels the andragogical principles of adult education developed by M. Knowles. Knowles (1980) states that of all the formats for learning, self-help has been the most congruent with andragogical principles. In his work, Knowles (1975) also states that andragogy or self-directed learning is premised on the following crucial assumptions about maturing learners. Those practicing within the health/wellness model of care hold similar assumptions:

1. The learner is a self-directed, independent being,
2. The role of the learner's experience is a rich resource for learning,
3. Learner readiness to learn develops from life tasks and concerns,
4. Motivation for learning springs from internal incentives.

As adult educators it is important to adopt an andragogical educational approach when planning and implementing Stress Management classes in order to

facilitate optimum learning opportunities. It is particularly important to teach such classes in light of this gloomy news regarding stress-related diseases and the state of "unhealth" in the United States.

The Gloomy News

Common stress-related diseases are arteriosclerosis, stroke, hypertension, cancer, arthritis, respiratory diseases, stomach ulcers, migraine headaches, some skin disorders, hyperactivity, depression, coronary artery disease. Studies indicate that a person with Type A behavior is almost three times as likely as Type B to get coronary heart disease in the age group 35-60. (Friedman, 1974) Major traits of this Type A personaility are chronic, ceaseless sense of time urgency; ambitious, competitive drive; status insecurity; impatience and easily aroused hostility; hurried speech and rapid gesture. Sound like anyone you know?

Other facts which reflect the U.S. Gross National Pathology include:

1. 144 million new prescriptions are written yearly for antidepressants, major and minor tranquilizers. It is estimated that by the year 2000 that every American will be taking tranquilizers. (Pelletier, 1977)

2. One of every ten Americans is dealing with an acknowledged alcoholic or suffers from emotional breakdowns. (Mahoney, Note 3)

3. Twenty to twenty-five million people suffer from hypertension which frequently leads to arteriosclerosis, congestive heart failure or stroke. (Pelletier, 1977)

4. Thirty million folks suffer from sleep-onset insomnia. (Pelletier, 1977)

5. In 1980 there were 2,413,000 marriages in the U.S. and 1,182,000 divorces. (Information Please Almanac, 1982, p. 767)

6. Approximately one million American children disappear annually and 8,000 are murdered. (Missing child, 1982)

What is stress? Stress is the response of the body to any physical or psychological demand upon it by a stressor or stressful agent. Sources of

stress can originate from the body, thoughts, environment or constant life changes. Stress may be from pleasant or unpleasant events. Common noticeable physical manifestations of stress are: dilated pupils; rapid, shallow breathing; increase in heart rate, pulse, muscle tension, perspiration; blanching of the skin; gastrointestinal diarrhea or stomach acidity. If stress is prolonged these physiological changes can also occur: decrease in capacity of the immune system, chronic increase in blood pressure-hypertension, and/or increase in blood cholesterol and clotting elements.

There are many stressors which can cause a stress response. Some of the future shock environmental stressors many of us encounter daily are: smog, loud noises, litter, impure water, chemical and nuclear wastes, crowds, ghetto living, employment pressures, itinerant society values and/or sensory overload. Consider some of the psychological stressors we suffer from: marital strife, parenting pressures, boredom, poverty, hostility, loneliness, depression, aging, and/or retirement. Physiological stressors can be from disease, injuries, illness, infirmity, poor nutrition, and poor physical fitness. Positive life stressors may be from love relationships, outstanding personal achievement, travel, holidays, new home, or adoption of a new lifestyle.

If an individual has diminished or ineffective adaptive responses to stress or if adaptive energy is depleted, the effect upon one's wellbeing will be deleterious. Replenishment of energy is needed to defend and reverse the possibility of such an outcome. To prevent the ill effects of chronic stress, it is necessary to have compensatory relaxation and a repertoire of daily stress-reduction activities. These will be particularly useful to prevent stress reactions and to retrain reactions to events. Individuals can change their interaction with themselves, others and the environment and can prepare and pursue a calm space fit. Though continuous replenishment of energy and time for daily regeneration, enhancement of health will occur.

The Good News

The good news is that Stress Management programs which are offered by adult education programs can teach others how to better cope with stresses of daily life. A typical program may include:

1. Assessing life stressors by calculating stress severity of life changes and studying the relationship between life changes and illness;

2. Active relaxation exercises--aerobics, sports, dance, movement meditation;

3. Passive relaxation exercises--breathing, conditioned relaxation, meditation, guided imagery, massage;

4. Creating a personal stress management program.

In case the reader is suffering unduly from stress after having read about the gloomy state of "unhealth" in the U.S., here is a quick, wonderfully effective breathing exercise which will restore the natural oxygen/carbon dioxide ratio of the bloodstream and thereby relieve anxiety caused by rapid, shallow breathing which occurs from too much stress. Here are the steps:

1. Seek a quiet environment, free from noise and distractions;

2. Sit upright, make yourself comfortable in position and clothing;

3. Take your pulse. (Thumb side of wrist, count heartbeats for one minute.) Close your eyes. Exhale strongly;

4. Inhale for 3 seconds. Hold for 12 seconds. Exhale for 6 seconds. Do this 3-12-6 breathing exercise for six cycles;

5. Inhale for 3 seconds. Hold for 20 seconds. Exhale for 6 seconds. Do this 3-20-6 breathing exercise for one cycle;

6. After these 7 cycles, sit quietly for one minute to allow normal breathing to return;

7. Take your pulse again. Usually there will be a drop of 3-5 pulse beats per minute. For extremely stressed persons, the count may drop as many as 20-30 beats per minute. (Matheney, Note 3)

When under stress, we breathe improperly and disturb our natural rhythms. This simple calming exercise can be practiced daily or whenever necessary to remedy breathing disturbances and stressful situations. As an adult educator you can help facilitate the learning of such an exercise through a Stress Management program.

Andragogical educators and health/wellness educators perceive their relationship to learners as one of facilitator, resource, and co-learner. Wellbeing and learning are encouraged, not delivered. Such educators stress free choice of alternative goals for learning with nondirective, interdependent decision-making among learner and teacher. The goal of the andragogical health educator is to increase the effectiveness of health/wellness teachings by encouraging selfcare, balance and harmony.

Toffler (1970, p.486) in his book, Future Shock, states that "Change is life itself. But change rampant, change unguided and unrestrained, accelerated change overwhelming not only man's physical defenses, but his decisional processes--such change is the enemy of life." Through Stress Management classes, individuals can learn to appraise their life situations, cope with constant changes and stressors and integrate into their daily lives regenerative, stress-reduction practices. Such andragogical learning opportunities can increase self-esteem and independence, two very important aspects of self which are necessary to adult growth, development and adaptation.

Assisting others as they seek Stress Management education will help them maximize their wellbeing. When individuals cope with perpetual change and care for themselves, they begin to value themselves as important, and this is how self-esteem begins to grow. Feelings of wellbeing transfer to others, to the community and to the society. To prepare individuals to become competent to engage in lifelong selfcare and to deal with constant change and stress is an urgent necessity and a challenge for adult education.

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